



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

HEADQUARTERS, 10TH MOUNTAIN DIVISION (LIGHT INFANTRY) AND FORT DRUM
FORT DRUM, NEW YORK 13602-5000

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

AFZS-GC (190)

MEMORANDUM FOR Department of the Army, Assistant Chief of Staff for
Installation Management, ATTN: DAIM-FDF-E, 7701 Telegraph and Leaf Roads,
Alexandria, VA 22315-3800

SUBJECT: Department of Defense Fire and Emergency Services Annual
Award

It is with great pride that I nominate Fort Drum Fire and Emergency Services
Division for the Department of Defense Heroism of the Year Team Award.
Recognizing the Fort Drum Fire and Emergency Services Division is the type of
recognition that they deserve and will cherish.

Encl

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Emory R. Helton", is positioned above the typed name.

EMORY R. HELTON
Colonel, Special Forces
Commanding

NOMINATION FOR "DOD HEROISM OF THE YEAR TEAM AWARD"
FORT DRUM FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

WHAT WAS THE ACT OF HEROISM ?

- On February 28, 2002 at 01:42 hours, Fort Drum 911 dispatch center received a call for mutual aid assistance. Report of a victim trapped by falling rocks 300 feet inside an underground cave located adjacent to the Black River.
- This was an extraordinary act of heroism as crews worked through the night below ground in a confined space, in wet sub zero temperatures, with the threat of impending collapse.
- Without concern for their own safety and well being, worked nearly twelve continuous hours before they were able to free their victim who was surrounded by a rock formation and pinned under a six hundred pound boulder and had life threatening, internal, back and broken leg injuries.
- Personnel involved were Captain Mitch Blaakman, Captain George Rothfritz, Lieutenant Kip Bachar, Firefighters Scott Warren, Michael Marks, Brian Drappo, Robert Tennies, Karl Tylenda, John Smith

WHAT WAS THE RISK TO THE RESCUER ?

- The greatest threat or danger was the potential collapse of the cave during rescue operations.
- Personnel entered the cave through a narrow opening that was only wide and high enough for a person to crawl through. At no point in the rescue were personnel able to stand up.
- Knowing there was only one recognized opening to bring personnel and equipment in and out of the cave. No secondary escape route should collapse occur.
- Rescuers were also at risk as they were exposed to possible toxic and oxygen deficient atmospheres.
- Personnel were also at risk for cold weather injuries as they performed their duties in below zero temperatures.
- Rescuers were hindered by flying bats and risk of rabies if bitten.

WHAT WAS THE APPROACH, METHOD, TECHNIQUE ?

- Upon arrival at the scene was briefed by the Incident Commander. After discussing the situation it was decided to do an initial assessment and determine a plan of action and what specialized equipment would be needed.
- Personnel entered the cave and made contact with the victim and three other rescue personnel tending to the victim. Immediate visual inspection indicated one large boulder was lodged against the victims lower back and a second smaller boulder was still above the victims head and back. In order to protect the victim from further injury steps were taken to ensure spinal immobilization and the boulder over his head and back was manually maneuvered safely out of the way.
- At this point a MSA PassPort air monitoring device was requested along with the following equipment: two 87 inch rescue air struts, two 12" swivel bases, two 6" solid bases, air bags, dead man regulator, air supply hoses, air bottle regulator. Clean air, positive pressure air source equipment.
- Once the rescue struts and air bags were in place repeated attempts were made to move the boulder from the victims back. Through out the entire rescue effort rescue struts were positioned and re-positioned and air bags were maneuvered over and over in an attempt to gain enough leverage and pressure to move the boulder from the victim. Each time the air pressure to the struts was increased until at 250 psi, the boulder moved approximately six inches, just enough to free the victim and clear the way for removal from the cave.
- During the entire period medical treatment of the victim was maintained. Spinal mobilization, airway management and shock therapy were administered.
- While interior victim removal was being completed crews outside the cave assembled a 4 to 1 hauling system which was used for retrieving the victim from the cave.

WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME ?

- Although the victim had expressed he had given up on life and wanted to die, the rescuers never gave up hope and managed to free the victim and safely remove him from the cave. Despite his life threatening injuries he is expected to make a full recovery.

OTHER

- Rescue personnel received the PARATECH Rescue Award for the performance of their duties which resulted in saving a life, reduction of bodily injuries.